

Message Text

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ACTION EUR-12

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TAGS: ELAB, BE
SUBJECT: BELGIAN STEEL STRIKE SETTLED

REF: BRUSSELS 12332

1. BELGIUM'S "NATIONWIDE" STEEL STRIKE, WHICH BEGAN IN
WALLONIA JUNE 22 (REFTEL), ENDED JUNE 28 WITH A NATIONAL
LABOR-MANAGEMENT AGREEMENT FOR THE PERIOD JULY 1, 1978 -
DECEMBER 31, 1979. THE ACCORD FOLLOWED ROUGHLY THE
LINES OF A SEPARATE AGREEMENT NEGOTIATED EARLIER AT SIDMAR,
BELGIUM'S MOST EFFICIENT STEEL PLANT, LOCATED IN FLANDERS.

2. ON THE MAIN QUESTIONS AT ISSUE, THE ACCORD PROVIDED:

- A) REDUCED WORKWEEK
- THE WORKWEEK WILL BE REDUCED TO 39 HOURS FROM
- NOVEMBER 1, 1978, AND TO 38 HOURS EFFECTIVE
- JULY 1, 1979. (THE UNIONS HAD DEMANDED AN IMMEDIATE
- REDUCTION TO 38 HOURS.)

- B) PENSIONS
- TWO TYPES OF PENSIONS WILL BE ESTABLISHED:

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- LAYOFF PENSIONS. APPLICABLE ONLY IN FIRMS WITH
- EXCESS PERSONNEL. AVAILABLE FROM AGE 55.
- BENEFITS TO TOTAL ABOUT 80 OF NORMAL WAGE;
- BENEFITS CONSISTING OF UNEMPLOYMENT COMPENSATION
- PLUS THE PAYMENT OF AN INDEMNITY EQUAL TO HALF
- THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN THE REFERENCE WAGE AND
- THE UNEMPLOYMENT BENEFIT. THERE IS TO BE AN

- ADDITIONAL BONUS OF BF 2500 A MONTH TO AGE 59; BF 1250 FROM AGE 60. (\$1 BF 32.8). (THE UNIONS HAD DEMANDED A GENERAL EXTENSION OF THIS TYPE OF PENSION THROUGHOUT THE INDUSTRY, REGARDLESS OF THE PERSONNEL SITUATION IN A GIVEN PLANT.)

- - GENERALIZED EARLY PENSION. EARLY PENSION FROM AGE 58. AVAILABLE THROUGHOUT THE INDUSTRY. BENEFITS TO CONSIST OF UNEMPLOYMENT COMPENSATION PLUS HALF THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN THE UNEMPLOYMENT BENEFIT AND THE REFERENCE WAGE. THIS TYPE OF PENSION TO BE AVAILABLE FROM AGE 55 FOR PERSONS WITH LIMITED MEDICAL DISABILITY.

- C) MISCELLANEOUS
 - AS A COUNTERPART TO THE REDUCTION IN THE WORKWEEK, THE UNIONS AGREED TO COOPERATE TO INCREASE PRODUCTIVITY, TO IMPROVE THE SOCIAL CLIMATE, TO COMBAT ABSENTEEISM, AND TO DELIVER A FULL DAY'S WORK FOR A FULL DAY'S PAY.

- MANAGEMENT AGREED TO REFRAIN FROM COLLECTIVE LAYOFFS FOR THE LIFE OF THE AGREEMENT - PROVIDING THE UNIONS ACCEPTED THE PRINCIPLE OF WORKER MOBILITY, BOTH WITHIN AND BETWEEN PLANTS. MANAGEMENT AGREED, FURTHER, TO PAY BONUSES AS LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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- FOLLOWS: BF 2000 IN JULY 1978; BF 2000 IN SEPTEMBER 1978; BF 1500 IN JANUARY 1979.

3. COMMENT

- PUTTING THE BEST POSSIBLE FACE ON THE ACCORD, WALLOON TRADE UNIONISTS CONGRATULATED THEMSELVES ON INTRA-REGIONAL TRADE UNION SOLIDARITY. IN FACT, SOLIDARITY WAS IMPERFECT EVEN WITHIN WALLONIA - THE WORKERS AT ONE PLANT HAVING ENTERED PREMATURELY INTO NEGOTIATIONS WITH THE EMPLOYERS. THE PRECISE SIGNIFICANCE OF THE WALLOON/FLEMING SPLIT IN THIS INSTANCE HAS STILL TO BE ASSESSED. SOME OBSERVERS HERE SEE IT, HOWEVER, AS INDICATIVE OF A TREND WHICH PROMISES TO DEVELOP FURTHER AS BELGIUM INCHES CLOSER TO ITS OWN PECULIAR BRAND OF APARTHEID.

4. VOLKSUNIE (VU) SENATOR DE FACQ HAS TOLD EMBASSY OFFICERS THAT HIS PARTY WAS INSTRUMENTAL IN THE FORMATION OF THE FLEMISH STEELWORKERS COMMITTEE, WHICH RALLIED OPPOSITION TO THE JUNE 22 STRIKE CALL. ASKED HOW THE CSC/FGTB HAD REACTED TO THE FORMATION OF THE STEELWORKERS COMMITTEE, DE FACQ SAID THAT THERE HAD BEEN SURPRISINGLY

LITTLE OPPOSITION. HE ATTRIBUTED THIS TO WHAT HE SAW
AS A DISTINCT CHANGE IN THE SOCIAL CLIMATE SINCE
REGIONALIZATION MOVED TO THE FRONT BURNER ABOUT A YEAR
AGO. CHAMBERS

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